HUNTER-GATHERER AND FARMER SYMBIOSIS FROM A LINGUIST'S POINT OF VIEW[1]

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INTRODUCTION

I want to speak today from a linguist's point of view, looking at the papers that have been presented. I am not an archeologist but for nearly 50 years have specialized in Philippine languages, not just with the languages of Negritos who are the traditional hunter-gatherers in the Philippines but with various languages spoken by farming groups.

What I would like to do today is to compare some of the issues related to hunter-gatherer and farmer symbiosis in Japan with what we find in the Philippines. Let us talk first about the first interactions between the incoming Yayoi and the resident Jōmon population.

THE JŌMON POPULATION

We must assume that when we talk about the Jōmon we are talking about a period in prehistory when Japan was occupied not by a single culture, nor by a unified group of people speaking a single language. There have been Jōmon people occupying all the major islands of the Japanese archipelago for probably well over 12,000 years.

The defining characteristics appear primarily to have been the fact that they were hunter-gatherers, who at least in some areas had developed cord-marked pottery and were relatively sedentary. But within these parameters there must have been a wide range of variation, depending on the ecological niches in which they found themselves, their relative success at exploiting the resources available to them, the extent that horticulture

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[1] This paper was originally presented as a comment following the presentation of papers in Session 6 (Interactions between Hunter-gatherers and Farmers in Prehistory and History) at the WAC Inter-congress, in Osaka, 13 January 2006. I wish to thank Professor Ikeya for inviting me to join the panel of discussants, and for the opportunity to meet and interact with the participants in the session.

had become part of their activities, and other such factors. Under these conditions and over that great period of time one can only assume that not only were there distinct Jōmon cultures, there were multiple languages, maybe hundreds of languages spoken throughout the Japanese archipelago.

We can compare the Jōmon situation with that found in New Guinea, a country which had been occupied by humans for more than 40,000 years before Europeans first arrived, and for whom hunting and gathering combined with horticulture (domestication of taro) was a way of life for around 10,000 years. The different geographical landscapes in which they lived, combined with the huge variety of cultural differences that developed, resulted in a linguistic diversity that was unparalleled elsewhere in the world. Over a thousand languages, belonging to scores of apparently completely unrelated phyla were being spoken, many by small, isolated groups in high mountain valleys, others by neighbors living almost adjacent to one another on coastal shores and along river valleys. It was probably the same in Japan, in that many of the same conditions that existed there existed also in Japan.

So the interaction we find between the Jōmon groups and the incoming progenitors of the Yayoi people must have taken place at different times, in different places and in quite different ways. But what we know is that apart from the Ainu who have maintained their identity, the other Jōmon peoples have been completely assimilated into the incoming Yayoi population, and their languages lost in favor of what is now spoken in Japan, although one might claim that at least some of the dialectal diversity of modern Japanese might be attributable to substrata from contact with the languages spoken by the assimilated Jōmon population.

HUNTER-GATHERER GROUPS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Now let us compare this with what we find in the Philippines. First, we notice that the Jōmon peoples, at the time of first contact with in-migrating Yayoi people, were far more technologically advanced than what we find among the hunter-gatherer groups in the Philippines. The Jōmon peoples had adapted themselves to a wide range of climatic conditions from the deep winters of northern Japan to the semi-tropical conditions of the Ryukyu Islands. They had settlements. They had elaborately constructed houses. They had highly-developed rituals and so on. This was not the case in the Philippines when the first Austronesian migrants arrived.

The earliest Austronesian migrants arrived in the Philippines around 4000 years ago, at least 2000 years before the first Yayoi contact with Jōmon. They were, like the Yayoi, a neolithic people, familiar with the techniques of grain agriculture, not only rice but also millet, and brought it with them when they arrived. The Austronesians came from the north, probably from the southeast coastal area of Formosa (now known as Taiwan), sailing south to the Batanes Islands in the Bashi Channel, and eventually entering Cagayan province in the north of Luzon. They also brought with them the knowledge of pottery, weaving and metal working. Before their arrival, the Philippines was occupied by a large number of Negrito hunter-gatherer groups. They were apparently "pure" hunter-gatherers at that time, without knowledge of pottery or weaving, and without horticulture of any sort, at least there have been no archaeological discoveries which might suggest that they were horticulturists.

In the Philippines today there are probably only about 25 such groups that are left. Most are located in the north of Luzon (some of whom are discussed by Minter in this volume), with a few groups (the Ata and Ati) in the central Visayan Islands, one group (the Batak) in Palawan and only one group remaining in Mindanao, the large southern island of the Philippines (the Mamanwa). There were probably a considerable number of other groups in Mindanao, but they have all been assimilated into the Manobo farming groups, many of whose members appear to be physically similar to Negritos, having darker skin and curlier hair than their non-Negrito neighbors. At least one such group maintains the name Ata, associated elsewhere in the Philippines with Negritos; however they no longer identify themselves as Negrito. The evidence is suggestive that they probably were once a Negrito group who inter-married with Manobo farmers and became assimilated into their population. In Indonesia all of the Negrito groups that must have once lived there have now also been completely assimilated.

Generally, the people we have been talking about are called Agta, but there are a number of different groups with similar names. There are five or six groups called Ayta (hence the common designation in Filipino/Tagalog as Ita); there are two Alta groups; there are a couple of groups called Atta, and then there are the Arta, a very highly endangered Negrito group. I did research on this group about 15 years ago, and at that time could only find 12 people left who spoke the language and several of these were already inter-married with Ilokano-speaking farmers, and the children of these unions spoke Ilokano and not the language of their Negrito parent. Recent (2007) attempts to

contact these people again were unsuccessful. Similarly, there are only a few elderly members left of an Agta group in Abra province, none of whom are able to speak any other language now than Ilokano. Their children are all intermarried with Ilokanos and no longer consider themselves to be Negrito.

All the remaining Negrito groups in the Philippines have lost their original languages and now speak an Austronesian language, related more or less closely to the language of the farming group in their vicinity. Negrito languages typically retain very old, conservative features of Austronesian languages, so we must assume that contact with in-migrating Austronesians must have taken place relatively soon after their first arrival in the north of the Philippines and language shift took place as the result of a close symbiotic relationship that developed between them, a relationship which extended into historic times, with Negrito groups supplying forest products to Austronesians in exchange for labor and a share in the rice harvest.

I have done a study on the relationships between the languages of these Negrito groups, and the languages of their neighbors and there is a wide range of differentiation. Some languages are very different from those of their neighbors, while others are very similar. These differences reflect, I believe, different types of interaction between the groups in question in pre-historic times. The language of the Arta, for example, the group I mentioned that is almost extinct, is more different from the language of its farmer neighbors than is found elsewhere in the Philippines. The sound changes that characterize the development of many of their words are unique in the Philippines, and Arta does not share any of the sound changes that characterize the language of its neighbors. The only explanation for this is that their original contact with in-migrating Austronesian farmers must have been very early. In the beginning they developed a very close relationship with the farmers, with both groups living together in the same or adjacent communities and with the children of both communities growing up together so that perhaps with a generation or two the Negritos abandoned their own language and spoke only the language of their Austronesian friends. But today their language is very different from that of their neighbors. How did this come about?

In order for the language that they learned to become so different from that of their neighbors, we must assume that at some early point, they separated themselves from their former farming friends, perhaps as a result of conflict and reasserted their own identity. Only with geographical and/or social distance can language splits take place. Although

they may have spent a long period completely independent from their neighbors, I believe that a cyclic interaction developed, swinging between complete independence on the one hand, and interdependence on the other, bringing them back into contact with their former Austronesian neighbors.

A different pattern of interaction between Negritos and farmers explains the language of another group of Negritos. These are the Atta in the far northern part of Luzon who speak a dialect of the Ibanag language. The languages of the Negritos and their farming neighbors are mutually intelligible. From this fact, we can assume that even though the original contact with farmers may have been in the distant past, they have been interacting on a continual basis with their neighbors, so that as the language of the farmers changed over time, the language of the Negritos was continuously being modified in favor of the current language of the Ibanag people. A point to note here is that despite the on-going close, symbiotic relationship between the Atta and the Negrito, continuing for perhaps thousands of years since first contact, the Negritos have maintained their own identity as hunter-gatherers.

This identity is most clearly manifest in the names that they call themselves. The names Agta, Atta, Alta, Ayta and Arta, differing only by the particular reflex of the proto-sound in the middle of the original word, means “Negrito person” in each of the languages. Many of these languages in turn have a name for “non-Negrito person”. Today, however, there are no longer any “pure” hunter-gatherers in the Philippines. All practice some kind of horticulture and in some places have acquired title to lands, acquired water buffalo for preparing fields, and have taken up agriculture. Typically this has been in response to the loss of forest cover, their inability to continue their traditional hunter-gathering life style, education and the efforts of government and non-government bodies to draw the Negritos into the body politic. While in many areas, the Negritos continue to maintain their identity and still speak a distinct language from their neighbors, in other areas, often as a result of intermarriage with non-Negritos, their former Austronesian language has been lost, and they are becoming fully assimilated into the nearest community of non-Negrito farmers.

CONCLUSION

What can this situation tell us about the pre-historic contact between the Jōmon peoples and the Yayoi? While in the Philippines there are still Negrito groups who

continue to maintain their own identity and speak distinct languages from their neighbors, in Japan it is only the Ainu who fit this description. While the genetic affiliation of the Ainu language is still controversial, it is clear that it has been heavily influenced by Japanese. Other Jōmon groups however, regardless of whether they maintained their own identity for hundreds of years or not, were all completely assimilated into the farming culture of the Yayoi. One may wonder what it was about the Yayoi that resulted in this assimilation. Agriculture is a strong motivator, and one must assume therefore that extensive periods of relatively peaceful interaction brought about a symbiotic relationship which ultimately led to intermarriage between the groups, loss of the old hunter-gatherer, horticulturalist life-style, and adoption of farming as the preferred way of life, with consequent loss of linguistic identity and the full adoption of the language of their neighbors.

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